

## Happy Trails – Is 26:7-9

Turn to Is 26:7-9; And while you're doing so, I'm going to put this backpack on

In a rare burst of creativity this week, and with all the camping and hiking that goes on during the summer, I thought I'd mix things up a bit  
And try to make things more memorable, in order to drive the point home all the more  
So I hope you'll indulge me, and I hope it helps; B/c the truths we're going to look at are as pertinent as ever to our lives

The core of which, is that – **As God's people . . .** we're blessed with quite a life, and quite a life-giver; And how we respond, is often the difference between a full life . . .  
And an empty one; Happy trails, or unhappy ones  
That's the point; And I want you to see it for yourself

[7] *The path of the righteous is level*; [and then, speaking to the Lord he says] *you make level the way of the righteous*. [8] *In the path of your judgments, O LORD, we wait for you; your name and remembrance are the desire of our soul*. [9] *My soul yearns for you in the night; my spirit within me earnestly seeks you. For when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness*.

In the lingo of camping and hiking, the first thing Isaiah's getting across here, is that . . .  
**We're blessed with a better trail (v7)**

A better path; A better *life*; That's the idea of a *level* way

Look at v7 again – *The path of the righteous is level; you make level the way of the righteous*. You make it better

It's similar to **Prov 3:6** that says – *In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths*.

IOW for those who are righteous, as in declared righteous and living it out – God makes their way, their life, their trail – better\*\*\*\*\*

There's no getting around it; B/c a *level* road, a level path – is better than a hilly one, every time; It's better; In which case we're blessed with a better trail

- But that *doesn't* mean that our lives as God's people will be free of *trouble*; Or without bumps; Or hardship  
Not only do we live in a fallen world among fallen people, including ourselves; But the Bible is clear that *as* God's people we're going to suffer; It's a fact (Phil 1:29)  
But even in the midst of suffering, our lives are still better than those w/out God; Better b/c of the *destination*, at the *end* of the trail; And better b/c of the *journey*, *on* the trail

And how could it be any different? With the trail's-end at heaven's doorstep, and the journey consisting of a full and free life – full of purpose and meaning . . .  
And free from the bondage of sin – how could it be anything *but* better?  
We've been taken *off* of the roller coaster to hell, and put *on* the highway to heaven

- It's like the privileged few who get to drive on the Autobahn every day (**Google Map**); And squeal with delight in doing so; Know what I'm talking about?  
The Autobahn is that series of highways in Germany where you can drive as fast as you want; Which my daughter did earlier this year when she reached a speed of 200kph  
Take a look at this **video** (Jessica 2013); Talk about increasing my heart rate; I get nervous just watching it

But she's as happy as can be; Why?

B/c the way was level, the ride was fun, and her destination quickly approached  
IOW it was a better way to travel; A better trail

- Far better than the 20 mile stretch of Highway 168 that leads to my parent's house in Missouri; It's the curviest, hilliest road I've ever been on  
Which was a thrill when I was a kid going to grandma's house; But as an adult, it's nerve-racking, and sometimes sickening; Much like life apart from Christ

But in Christ, God makes it better; He *makes level the way of the righteous*  
He turns our Highway 168's into Autobahn's, and our roller coasters into interstates

When we trust him with our *destination*, he does that for our *journey*  
God's people are blessed with a better trail

- The problem is, we don't **follow it**  
Instead of staying on the straight/narrow, we go cross country; We forge our own trail  
Instead of living according to God's Word, we live according to man's; Reverting back to the “me do it” two year-old stage; Thinking we *can* when we can't

Or, we *follow* the trail, but mess it up

Much like the climbers of Mt. Everest these days (**Photo**); Have you heard about this?

Apparently, the mountain is *littered* with empty oxygen tanks and Sterno cans

And sometimes, the climbers get in fights on the way up

They follow the trail – but make a mess of it as they do

And we often do the same on the trail of life – littering the way with the leftovers of sin, and stabbing each other in the back while feigning concern\*\*\*\*\*

- Or, a 3<sup>rd</sup> kind of travesty, but a bit more subtle – is that we turn the trail into a duty of drudgery; A duty of drudgery where . . .  
We intentionally suppress any enjoyment or delight, b/c we think it's more spiritual  
We get it in our head that it's somehow wrong or ungodly to *enjoy* the life God has given us, so we hide it under the bushel of our sour face and serious demeanor  
All in the name of being spiritual

When in reality, it's anything but spiritual; If God has given us all good things like the Bible says – including time, talent, treasure, opportunities, situations . . .  
If he's given us all good things, then failing to *enjoy* them while using them for his purposes, and failing to enjoy them *by* using them for his purposes . . .  
Robs him of the glory

It would be like standing up in the middle of a crowded restaurant on your anniversary, and giving your wife a new ring that she kind of sloughs off like it's no big deal  
Or tries to hide b/c she's embarrassed  
What does that do to *you* as her husband? It robs you of the glory you might otherwise receive, were she to stand up and give you a kiss  
Just like we rob God of the glory when we turn his trail into a duty of drudgery

If God has *blessed* us with a better trail, and he has – then we should keep it that way, free of litter, and follow it with joy

2<sup>nd</sup>, as God's people . . .

### **We're blessed with a trail guide (v8a)**

8a – *In the path of your judgments, O LORD, we wait for you*

*In the path of your judgments* meaning – according to the way God decides; Or leads  
That's the idea of his *judgments* here; It's the sum total of his decisions and acts, to lead  
us and guide us in a particular direction or path  
It's not just his punishment/discipline, but *all* the different ways God influences our  
lives

The implication being, that our life as God's people consists of an unbroken string of his  
sovereign decisions, to lead and guide us; Which makes him a trail guide like no other

➤ Now, I don't know about you, but I haven't had a lot of exposure to trail guides  
Except as a young adult when I went to S. Dakota for the 1<sup>st</sup> time to shoot prairie dogs –  
having no clue where to go or what to look for; So we hired a guide  
And it's a good thing we did, b/c even when he took us to the first "town" as they're  
called, we couldn't see them

In fact, we thought he was pulling our leg when he stopped in the middle of nowhere, got  
of the truck, and said – "Here you go; Start shooting"  
And we were like, "Where?" There were literally dozens of them within sight, but we  
didn't know what to look for  
And he not only had to tell us where to go, but point out individual targets at first

Which is exactly what God has done for us; And continues to do  
Through his Word, and his Spirit, and his people, and the circumstances of our lives that  
he ordains and allows – he points us in the right direction  
He leads us in the way everlasting; He *guides* us on the trail

But the key is waiting; We're blessed with a cosmic trail guide, but we need to . . .

#### • **Wait for him**

Had we struck out on our own, we probably would have struck out; So we waited  
Which is exactly what Isaiah confesses to God, on our behalf – *In the path of your  
judgments, O LORD, we wait for you*

And why wouldn't you?

Instead of some no-name guide from the internet, he's the God we *know*, by name  
Instead of being a complete stranger, he's the God who knows *us*; Intimately  
Instead of some self-proclaimed expert, he's *worthy* of our trust  
Which means we'd be complete *fools* not to wait for him

It's like that song we sing – "We won't move without you"

The idea being that we're going to wait for *God* to move in our life, before *we* do

➤ And I've learned that when he does, two things are often true  
(A) I'm favorably carried along by the course of events; And . . .  
(B) Any decisions I *do* have to make, are no-brainers  
I don't have to stress about them, I don't have to agonize over them, and I certainly  
don't second guess them; It's very straight forward, and very simple; Very clear  
When *God* moves, all I have to do is put one foot in front of the other

Which is how it was buying our house 9 years ago this month

Becky identified it as a good possibility, and though I thought otherwise at first, I was  
irresistibly drawn back to it, and it became a no-brainer  
So much so, that the pieces fell into place almost effortlessly; And we were simply  
carried along by the course of events; *Wait* on the Lord; Wait for him in life

➤ And do so confidently; That's the gist of the word here in v8

*Wait* carries the connotation of confident expectation; *In the path of your judgments, O  
LORD, we wait for you* with confident expectation

Does that mean we should sit around and twiddle our thumbs until lightning strikes?

Obviously not; Following the trail God has for us . . .

*Starts* with obeying the commands God has *already* given, and responding to the  
opportunities at *hand* – and *then* acting on the impulses of his Spirit as they come  
Wait for him to lead and guide, but don't delay if he's already moved

And then 3<sup>rd</sup> . . .

### **We're blessed with a park ranger (v8b-9)**

As God's people we're blessed with a better trail that we need to follow . . .

We're blessed with a trail guide for whom we need to wait . . .

And we're blessed with a park ranger

8b – *Your name and remembrance are the desire of our soul. [9] My soul yearns for you  
in the night; my spirit within me earnestly seeks you. For when your judgments are in  
the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.*

IOW "when you're present God, things are better; *People* are better"

Just like they are when a park ranger is around – people behave, and things are better

After all, he's the one who made the paths in the first place; And takes care of them; And  
protects those who walk them; And guards against those who would destroy them . . .  
And loves those who use them

And the same is true of God; Only w/ him, it's on a world-wide scale

Making and marking *our* paths; Protecting *us* as we walk them; Guarding against  
those who destroy them; And blessing those who keep them

He does that; Just like a park ranger

#### • Which is why we should **yearn for him**

As God's people, we're blessed with a park ranger, for whom we should yearn

Do you yearn for God in your life? Would that describe you?

Are his *name and remembrance* the desire of your soul like it says in v8?

IOW are you *desperate* for the full expression of who he is in your life – his name?

And do you long to keep him in the forefront of your mind, your *remembrance*?

Do you desire him with that kind of intensity and purpose? I hope so

And I hope you yearn for him *in the night* like it says in v9; Especially the dark night of  
your soul; Turning to him when danger seems imminent, or evil palpable  
I sure do; In fact, this verse described me to a "T" one night recently

➤ We were in Phoenix, I had just preached a Saturday night service, and shortly after we went to bed, we heard Julia scream  
So we ran into her room, and found her half groggy, saying that she thought she heard something fall in her room  
So we looked around, opened the closet, looked under the bed – but didn’t find anything  
So we kissed her goodnight and went back to ours

But as I did, I *could not shake* an overwhelming sense of fear and evil; It was as if someone was in the house  
And after getting up again to check on the other girls, and opening every closet door and checking every window and lock in the place . . .  
I finally went back to bed and *yearned* for God’s comfort

Lying in bed for I don’t know how long – praying, and talking to God, and quoting verses like – *When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.* (Ps 56:3)  
And *you keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you* (Is 26:3)  
And I sang worship songs in my head, b/c *my soul* [yearned for him] *in the night*

And I’m happy to say that he responded; B/c eventually I relaxed, went to sleep, and woke up completely rested and refreshed – ready to preach and minister the next morning

➤ How about you? Do you yearn for him to draw near? And earnestly seek him in your spirit like it says in v9b – *my spirit within me earnestly seeks you?*  
Earnestly, as in, with motivation and perspiration, for the purpose of transformation and adoration? Is that you?  
And does it show in your Bible reading? And prayer? And worship? And fellowship?

I hope so; B/c it not only benefits you, it benefits our world; Our culture  
*For when your judgments are in the earth* [Isaiah says], *the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.* (9c)  
One of the reasons to yearn *for* God, is so people will *learn, from* God

You see, when the sum total of God’s ways and truths are brought to bear, his judgments – righteousness flourishes; People learn  
And when the rod of his *correction* is felt – morality follows  
And when the power of his *presence* is near – evil flees (**Summary**)

➤ Do you yearn for him? And wait for him? And follow him on the better trail he’s laid out for you? I hope so  
And I hope you never think of camping and hiking the same, again

Prayer – Thank you for the life you’ve given us; And thank you for the way you guide us and love us; Truly, *your name and remembrance are the desire of our soul*  
So receive our tithes and offerings now for that very purpose; *We* give faithfully, b/c you give faithfully